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ABSTRACT

An Arkansas project is providing on site competency based training to undergraduate and graduate level personnel of day service centers serving mentally handicapped and otherwise developmentally disabled persons. The program has included five training components: (1) academic courses in early childhood education, (2) an exchange of ideas between day service center personnel within the state through a visitation program, (3) the exchange of exemplary lesson plans and motivational techniques between centers, (4) visitation to other states for the purpose of gaining innovative ideas and techniques, and (5) methods of parent education. Strengthening of the parent education component, development of on site miniworkshops, and increased emphasis on application of early childhood education theory to age appropriate activities are planned for the third year of the project. (DB)

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APPLICATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TO THE TRAINING OF DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED PERSONS (A Model For Training Trainers)

Introduction

The concept of implementing early childhood techniques for the training of physically and mentally handicapped persons is not new. Historically, we can trace its heritage to such early childhood theorists as Pestalozzi and more recently, Montessori.

Somewhere, we as educators went astray. In the quest for building empires at institutions of higher education we chose alternate paths. We devised departments of elementary education, early childhood education and special education.

These departments, hopefully, had one goal in common, educating and training of teachers of our children. Although the goal may be common, duplication of efforts, tremendous expense and time, as well as protectionism keeps this illogical departmentalization secure.

The concept further described in this paper was built entirely on a question I have asked myself several times, "What's so special about special education?" With the advent of PL94-142, perhaps more educators should pose this question.

If we are to train the teachers of tomorrow to accept the purpose of PL94-142, perhaps our institutions ought to implement the same concepts at the teacher training level.

Sidney T. Mitchell, Ph.D
Project Director

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Overview

Arkansas, like the nation, has its share of handicapped persons - mentally retarded citizens alone account for some 60,000. Providing services for this large segment of the population poses a definite challenge to local, state, and national agencies. Evidence indicates that the majority of these persons can be trained and educated to live satisfying and productive lives. Thus, in the late sixties, day service centers were established by Mental Retardation-Developmental Disabilities Services (MR-DDS) in local communities to provide educational services to its handicapped citizens. These centers were staffed largely by untrained, but dedicated personnel who did their best with available resources. The educational approach to clients was often negative as a result of being based on a deficit model. It was soon established that a unified effort was needed to effectively train day service center personnel.

In this vein, Dr. Sidney T. Mitchell of the Early Childhood Education Department of the University of Central Arkansas and representatives from MR-DDS joined together to design a training program for day service center personnel which has proven to be an effective model of "training trainers." Based on the premise that Early Childhood Education theories, methods, and techniques are effective for working with the developmentally delayed, this program stresses the stages of child development and presents a method of instruction which can be adapted to clients who often function mentally at below nine (9) years of age.

The University of Central Arkansas Early Childhood Training Project, funded by Title XX funds, has provided on-site competency based instruction to 114 day service center personnel in 22 day service centers during the 1977-78 academic year and 118 day service center personnel in 24 centers during the 1978-79 academic year. The persons involved in the training include both undergraduate and graduate students.

The training objective in the first year consisted of four major training components. These included: (1) academic courses in Early Childhood Education; (2) an exchange of ideas between day service center personnel within the state through a visitation program; (3) the exchange of exemplary lesson plans and motivational techniques between centers; and (4) visitation to other states for the purpose of gaining innovative ideas and techniques which may be utilized in the day service centers in Arkansas. These objectives were continued in the second year with the addition of a Parent Education Program component.

Program staff consists of a project director, program coordinator, two (2) assistant professors and six (6) instructors. The program provides services to Day Service Centers in central, eastern, and southern Arkansas. Each instructor and professor lives in a centrally located community in his assigned area (see figure one), traveling to the various centers comprising that region. A typical day has instructors traveling from 50 to 150 miles over a variety of roads and throughfares.

The course instruction in the centers is parallel to the course offerings on campus with one major exception--each classroom has its own laboratory in which the theory taught can be implemented immediately by the University of Central Arkansas instructor and the center participant working directly with the clients. Each instructor spends approximatley six hours per week actively involved in the center program as teacher/learner.

Although there is a definite difference in the graduate/undergraduate offerings, the courses are correlated to provide for a team effort at each center. Every assignment is a practical application of early childhood theory with the graduate projects being an extension into research. (It is important to note that each theory presented is immediately applied to an existing learning situation or learning style of clients being served at each center.)

Many vehicles are used by university staff to instruct their pupils. They include: group lectures, role modeling, observation and participation as well as individual instruction. Students, using Early Childhood Theory and techniques are formulating many innovative materials that are administered from an age appropriate perspective. These materials are objectively evaluated and more emphasis is placed on gearing them toward useable knowledge designed to strengthen independent living skills.

Through the use of role modeling, University instructors have prompted alternative approaches to teaching, and a more efficient learning environment. Also, early childhood teaching materials have been demonstrated by the staff and supplied to the centers for use in their educational program. Training and support furnished by the university instructors have strengthened the confidence of participants as well as motivating many to continue their professional training.

As a result of a statewide exchange program, a professional network has been initiated for many persons working with day service centers, allowing a natural exchange of ideas beneficial for improved staff competency. This was accomplished through: (1) area workshops, (2) teacher exchange between centers, and (3) classes held at different centers on a rotating basis.

Visiting the physical facilities and discussing the use of space and the learning environment have caused positive changes in many centers, giving them new perspectives and incentives for working with difficult cases. Consequently, this positive feeling on the part of staff members concerning their own competencies has carried over into the classroom. Participants have been inspired to critically analyze needs of clients and centers and to seek additional resources, information and materials to alleviate these needs.

Hopefully, an understanding of the cooperative role of day service centers in Arkansas has replaced the isolated center view formally held by most center personnel.

This concept was expanded to include awareness of national issues through professional growth activities arranged by the Early Childhood Training Project staff. These included both in-state and out-of-state training sessions and consultants brought into specific centers.

Students also participated in conferences, workshops, and seminars on a regional and national basis specifically geared to their center needs. Students and university staff ascertained and disseminated information and materials on Piagetian techniques in working with the handicapped, infant stimulation, gifted handicapped and physical management of the multiply handicapped.

The Parenting Component became an objective of the 1978-79 funding year. Participants enrolled in the project were assigned home visits and parent conferences as part of their course requirements. Consultants, as well as University personnel, were utilized to enhance this aspect of the project.

The parenting component was perhaps the weakest area of the project. This can be attributed to many reasons, but parent participation and weaknesses of staff and participants in the area of interpersonal skills were obvious. To alleviate this, a specialist was utilized during the midyear. While great strides were made during the second half of the 1978-79 year, more emphasis will be given to interpersonal skill building, and the involvement of parents in the education of their children through planned seminars, workshops and visitations during the 1979-80 funding year.

Also in the third year the continuation grant emphasis will be placed on the strengthening of skills through on-site mini-workshops which will concentrate on problems limited in scope and workshops for longer periods of time concerning problems common to the majority of staff members at selected centers.

Although an understanding of early childhood theory will remain the major emphasis of the project, the staff will make a concentrated effort to assure that the application of these theories is manifested in activities that are age appropriate for the client being served. This will assure the most important purpose of inservice training--the strengthening and reinforcement of dignity and self worth on the part of the client being served.

Tangible results for participants have included a monthly newsletter "highlighting" a particular center, its goals, personnel and, most importantly, its clients. Soon to be available is a set of activities to be used for all those interested in the education of children, regardless of their developmental stage.

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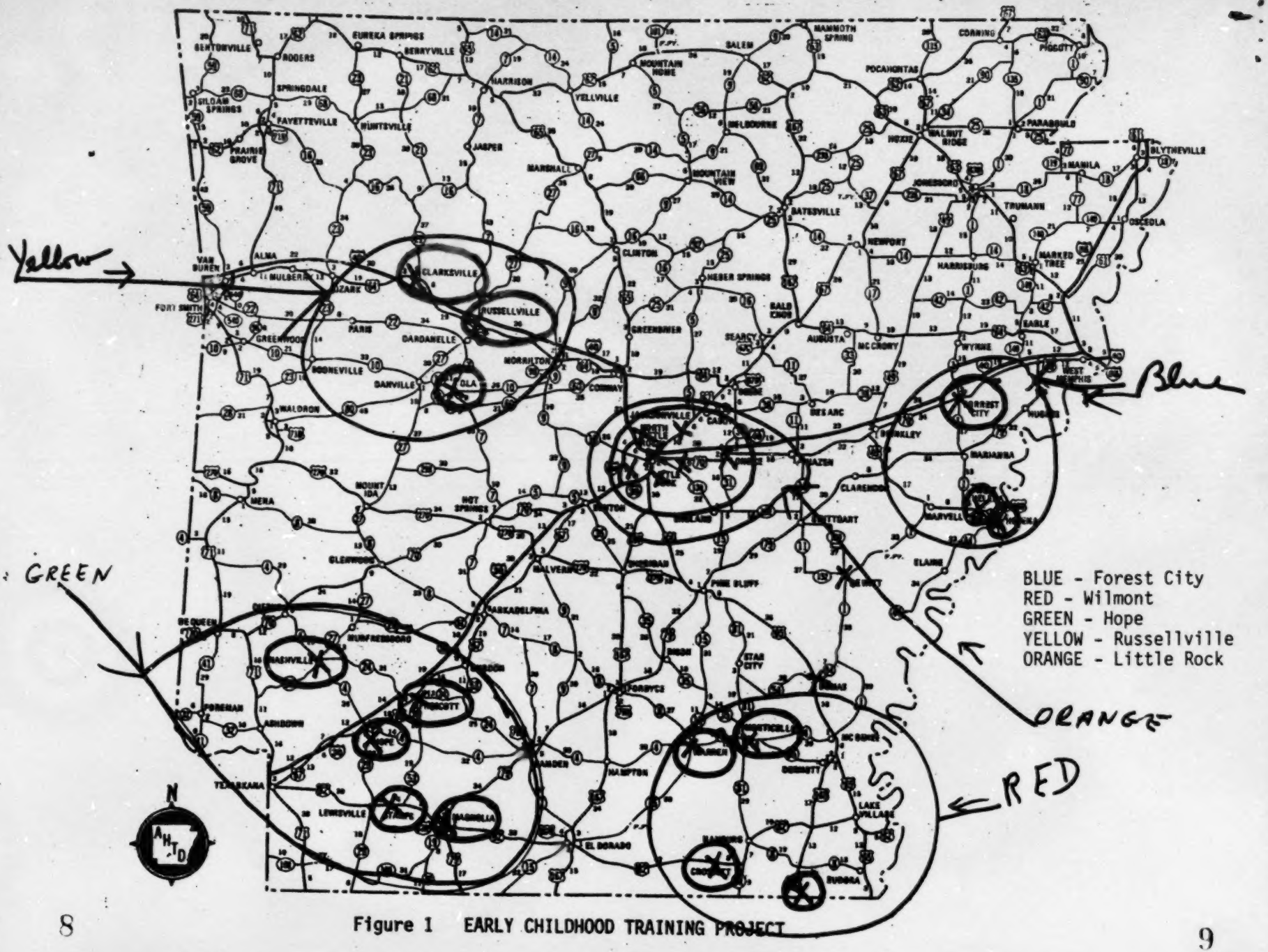

Figure 1 EARLY CHILDHOOD TRAINING PROJECT